



PARENTS' AND CARERS' GUIDE TO VIDEO GAMES RATINGS

It is probably true that most parents and carers of children have grown up in the video age and therefore have a reasonable understanding of the classification system and the ability to decide whether a particular video or DVD is suitable for their children. If all else fails a parent or carer can always watch the video or DVD before making a decision.

This is not always the case when it comes to video games where all too often the child is more adept at using the computer or games console and the parent or carer sometimes doesn't know how to access what the child is playing. As a result it is important that parents and carers have something to guide them when making a decision on whether a game is suitable.

Until the summer of 2012 games were generally exempt from the BBFC classification system that applies to videos and DVDs. However, this exemption could be lost usually because the game showed realistic scenes of gross violence or sexual activity. If this happened the game had to be legally classified and received one or other of the BBFC classification certificates given for videos/DVDs. For some time you will still see games released before the summer of 2012 in the shops showing the BBFC classifications.

Since 2003 the large majority of games did not require legal classification by the BBFC and have been age rated under the voluntary Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) system which operates in the UK and over 30 other countries of Europe. The Video Standards Council has been and remains an administrator of this system.



From the summer of 2012 the PEGI system has been effectively incorporated into UK law and the VSC has been designated as the body responsible for the age rating of video games under the PEGI system. Video games will be age rated at one or other of the following age levels.



You will see the age ratings marked on the sleeves.

It is important to note that the age ratings 12, 16 and 18 age ratings are mandatory and that it is illegal for a retailer to supply any game with any of these ratings to anyone below the specified age.

The age ratings 3 and 7 are advisory only.

The PEGI age ratings will enable parents and carers to make an informed choice when buying a game for their children.

It should also be noted that the ratings relate to the content of the game and not to how difficult the game is to play. A chess game would probably have a 3 rating but would hardly be recommended for toddlers.

As an additional aid to purchasers (particularly parents and carers) video games rated under the PEGI system will usually display one or more descriptors to give an indication as to the reasons why a game has been age rated at a particular age level. There are 10 possible descriptors.



WHAT DO THE PEGI AGE RATINGS MEAN?



The content of games given this rating is considered suitable for all age groups. Some violence in a comical context (typically Bugs Bunny or Tom & Jerry cartoon-like forms of violence) is acceptable. The child should not be able to associate the character on the screen with real life characters, they should be totally fantasy. The game should not contain any sounds or pictures that are likely to scare or frighten young children. No bad language should be heard and there should be no scenes containing nudity or any scenes referring to sexual activity.



Any game that would normally be rated at 3 but contains some possibly frightening scenes or sounds may be considered suitable in this category. Some scenes of partial nudity may be permitted but never in a sexual context.



Video games that show violence of a slightly more graphic nature towards fantasy characters and/or non graphic violence towards human-looking characters or recognisable animals, as well as video games that show nudity of a slightly more graphic nature will fall into this category. Any bad language in the category must be mild and fall short of sexual expletives.



This rating is applied once the depiction of violence (or sexual activity) reaches a stage that looks the same as would be expected in real life. More extreme language, the encouragement of the use of tobacco and drugs and the depiction of criminal activities can be included in this category.



This adult rating is applied when the level of violence reaches a stage where it becomes gross violence and/or includes elements of specific types of violence. In general terms it is where the level of violence is so visually strong that it would make the reasonable viewer react with a sense of revulsion. This rating is also applied where the level of sexual activity is explicit which may mean that genitals are visible. Any game that glamorises the use of real life drugs will also probably fall into this category.

WHAT DO THE DESCRIPTORS MEAN?

The descriptors are fairly self-explanatory but should be read in conjunction with the age rating given for a video game. A violence descriptor with an 18 rated game will indicate a more extreme level of violence than a violence descriptor with a 12 rated game. Similarly a sex/nudity descriptor with a 12 rated game will probably indicate sexual innuendo but a sex/nudity descriptor with an 18 rated game will indicate sexual content of a more explicit nature.



The video game may refer to or depict the use of drugs.



The video game may be frightening or scary for young children.



The video game may contain depictions of or material which may encourage discrimination.



The video game will contain bad language. At a 12 rating this will be mild swearing but at a 16 rating and above it will include sexual expletives.



The video game may encourage or teach gambling.



The video game will contain depictions of violence



The video game may show nudity in a sexual setting



The video game may show sexual behaviour or sexual references



The video game may contain horrific sounds or horror effects which may be shocking or cause revulsion to the viewer



The video game can be played online possibly with or against other people

MORE INFORMATION

The above information endeavours to advise you about the basics of the PEGI age rating system and the descriptors to enable you to make an informed decision when deciding whether any particular video game is suitable for your child or children under your care. However you may wish to have further information and in this respect there are a number of other sources to which you can refer.

THE GAMES RATING AUTHORITY WEBSITE

As an administrator of the PEGI age rating system and the body responsible for the age rating of video games in the UK the Video Standards Council operates under the name Games Rating Authority.



The Games Rating Authority has its own website at: www.gamesratingauthority.org

This site contains a search facility enabling parents to get additional consumer information as to why a game has received a particular PEGI rating.

THE PEGI WEBSITE

The PEGI system operates in the UK and over 30 other countries of Europe. If you visit the PEGI website it will give you a wealth of information about PEGI.

You can also search for any game where you would like age rating and brief content specific information.

In addition this site gives you the ability to make enquiries, requests for information or make complaints about anything you do not agree with.

www.pegi.info

iPHONE APP

If you have an iPhone you can download a free PEGI app. This app not only explains the PEGI system but also gives you the ability to search for any game rated under the PEGI system. Once you have located the game you are looking for you will not only see details of the age rating and descriptors but also a short text description of the content of the game.

